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INFO OCT-01 SS-14 UPW-01 AID-10 USIA-04 NSC-10 NSCE-00
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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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USDEL FRANCE
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Joan Lyubery DATE 1/26/82
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 SAIGON 14681

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SUBJ: THE ELECTORAL SITUATION - PRESENT ATTITUDES OF POLITICAL GROUPS IN VIET NAM

1. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS: ALMOST ALL VIETNAMESE POLITICAL ELEMENTS HAVE BEEN CRITICAL OF PRESIDENT THIEU'S ELECTORAL TACTICS AND HIS INTENTION TO PROCEED WITH AN UNCONTESTED ELECTION. EVEN HIS FRIENDS AND NORMAL SUPPORTERS FEEL THAT HIS ACTIONS HAVE BEEN HEAVY-HANDED AND ILL-CONCEIVED AND HAVE HARMED THE REPUTATION OF THE RVN.

2. OPPOSITION ELEMENTS ARE OF COURSE BITTERLY CRITICAL BUT SO FAR DO NOT SEEM TO BE MAKING CONCERTED OR EFFECTIVE EFFORTS TO COORDINATE AN ATTACK ON THIEU OR A BOYCOTT OF THE ELECTION. THE TRADITIONAL VIETNAMESE INABILITY TO WORK COOPERATIVELY WILL PROBABLY HAMPER EFFORTS BY THE MILITANT OPPOSITION TO PULL THIEU DOWN AND BY THE RESPONSIBLE OPPOSITION TO CHANGE THIEU'S CHOSEN COURSE. THE COMMUNISTS MTATE THEY HAVE AN OPPORTUNE

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MOMENT BUT THEIR ASSETS TO EXPLOIT IT ARE LIMITED. THE MILITANTS AMONG THE STUDENTS AND VETERANS ARE POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS, BUT THEY TOO ARE SPLIT, LACK PUBLIC SUPPORT AND ARE UNDER CLOSE WATCH BY THE SECURITY SERVICES. AN QUANG, TAKING THE LONG VIEW AND SATISFIED WITH THE LOWER HOUSE RESULTS, SEEMS RELUCTANT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN CIVIL DISTURBANCES. THE MINH CAMP IS RESENTFUL BUT DOES NOT SEEM PURPOSEFUL. KY IS OUTSPOKENLY ANXIOUS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE PRESENT SITUTATION AND ASSUME LEADERSHIP OF THE OPPOSITION, BUT HIS POLITICAL BASE REMAINS INADEQUATE FOR SUCH A ROLE.

3. THE GENERALS, WHO STILL ARE THE BASIC ARBITERS OF POWER, SHOW NO SIGNS OF WANTING TO RISK A BREAKDOWN IN NATIONAL LEADERSHIP (OR TO GET DRAWN INTO THE CURRENT POLITICAL STRUGGLE). THIEU HAS REWARDED THEM WITH PROMOTIONS AND PROBABLY CAN CONTINUE TO COUNT ON THEIR LOYALTY, AT LEAST FOR THE SHORT TERM. THE PREVALENT ATTITUDE IN THE POLITICALLY AWARE MINORITY OF THE GENERAL POPULACE SEEMS TO BE ONE OF DISGUST AND CYNICAL ACCEPTANCE.

4. THE INGREDIENTS FOR MAJOR TROUBLE ARE PRESENT, BUT, LIKE A SOGGY BARREL OF GUNPOWDER, THE SITUATION NEEDS MORE THAN A SPARK APPLIED BEFORE AN EXPLOSION CAN TAKE PLACE. SOME VIOLENT PROTESTS, COMMUNIST SPONSORED INCIDENTS, AND PERHAPS FAIRLY WIDESPREAD BOYCOTT EFFORTS CAN BE EXPECTED. AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON THIEU IS ALWAYS A POSSIBILITY. IT LOOKS NOW AS IF PRESIDENT THIEU WILL BE ABLE TO RIDE OUT, AT LEAST FOR THE SHORT TERM, AN UNCONTESTED ELECTION WITHOUT MAJOR DISTURBANCES, UNLESS HE MAKES ADDITIONAL SERIOUS ERRORS OF JUDGMENT, THE OPPOSITION ELEMENTS SHOW UNEXPECTED ABILITY TO WORK TOGETHER, OR THERE ARE UNFORESEEN INCIDENTS WHICH SERIOUSLY AGGRAVATE THE PROBLEM. ALMOST ALL POLITICALLY ACTIVE VIETNAMESE HAVE THEIR EYES HALF COCKED TOWARD WASHINGTON, AND SIGNS OF WITHDRAWAL OF FAVOR FROM THIEU OR CONGRESSIONAL MOVES AGAINST AID FOR VIET NAM COULD CATALYZE OPPOSITION TO THIEU. END SUMMARY.

5. AS PRESIDENT THIEU KICKED OFF HIS "CAMPAIGN" FOR THE ONE-MAN RACE, HIS TACTICS THAT HAD LED TO THE WITHDRAWAL OF KY AND MINH AND HIS LATER DECISION TO PROCEED WITH AN UNCONTESTED ELECTION HAVE DRAWN THE HEAVIEST AND MOST WIDESPREAD CRITICISM HE HAS YET FACED. A MAJORITY OF THE POPULACE IS OF COURSE POLITICALLY APATHETIC OR INDIFFERENT. MOST VIETNAMESE ARE SKEPTICAL ABOUT POLITICS AND THIEU'S ACTIONS SO FAR, WHILE CON-

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SIDERED FAULTY AND SELFISH, HAVE NOT INSPIRED AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC THE DEGREE OF FEELING PRESENT IN THE LATTER DAYS OF DIEM. THE AVERAGE VIETNAMESE SEEMS TO REGARD THE EVENTS AS CONFIRMATION OF HIS SKEPTICISM RATHER THAN AS CAUSE FOR ACTION. HOWEVER, POLITICALLY AWARE VIETNAMESE OF PRACTICALLY ALL TENDENCIES APPEAR TO BELIEVE THAT THIEU HAS BADLY MISHANDLED THE ELECTORAL SITUATION.

6. FROM WHAT HAS BEEN SEEN SO FAR, IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL THAT THE OPPOSITION WILL FIND THE WILL OR ABILITY TO UNITE AND FORCE THIEU TO CHANGE COURSE. FOLLOWING ARE ASSESSMENTS OF THE PRESENT ATTITUDES OF THE VARIOUS POLITICAL GROUPS OPPOSED TO THE OCTOBER 3 UNCONTESTED ELECTION.
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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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7. AFTER HIS WITHDRAWAL ANNOUNCEMENT GENERAL MINH WENT BACK TO HIS NORMAL PRIVATE PURSUITS.

SOME OF MINH'S YOUNGER AND MORE ACTIVE SUPPORTERS, SUCH AS LY QUI CHUNG, MAY BE VIGOROUS IN THEIR ACTIVITIES AGAINST THE REGIME, BUT IT DOES NOT LOOK AS IF THE MINH CAMP WILL BE A DISCIPLINED FORCE AGAINST THIEU.

8. VICE PRESIDENT KY IS DIFFERENT AND HE IS OBVIOUSLY SEEKING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE PRESENT UNCERTAINTIES TO SEIZE LEADERSHIP OF THE OPPOSITION AND TOPPLE THIEU, NOW OR LATER. IN HIS INFLAMMATORY "BACKGROUNDER" SEPTEMBER 3, HE CLAIMED HE WOULD "DESTROY THIEU." HIS MORE SERIOUS PROPOSAL FOR SIMULTANEOUS RESIGNATION WAS FORMALLY REJECTED BY THIEU. ON SEPTEMBER 10 HE FLOATED ANOTHER PROPOSAL CALLING FOR THIEU ONLY TO RESIGN IN ORDER THAT KY WOULD ORGANIZE THE ELECTIONS WITHOUT BEING A CANDIDATE HIMSELF. A PROPOSAL ALSO SURE TO BE REJECTED. HE IS REPORTEDLY TRYING TO COORDINATE WITH MINH AND HIS CAMP, BUT THIS

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EFFORT, TOO, APPEARS UNPROMISING. KY MIGHT WISH TO TAKE RASH ACTION, BUT HIS IMMEDIATELY USABLE SUPPORT IN THE AIR AND GROUND FORCES IS LIMITED AND HIS POLITICAL SUPPORT IS SLIPPING BACK TOWARD ITS VERY NARROW BASE AS THE SURGE OF SYMPATHY SUBSIDES FOR KY-THE-UNDERDOG.

9. KY HAS BEEN IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH MORE MILITANT ELEMENTS AMONG THE VETERANS WHO SUPPORT HIM, PARTICULARLY THE VIET NAM DISABLED VETERANS ASSOCIATION. THERE HAVE ALREADY BEEN SEVERAL SUCCESSFUL OR ATTEMPTED IMMOLATIONS, WHICH HOWEVER WERE PROBABLY INDIVIDUALLY MOTIVATED. THEY NEVERTHELESS RAISE THE POLITICAL TEMPERATURE, ARE REPUGNANT TO THE PEOPLE, AND CAN HAVE UNPREDICTABLE CONSEQUENCES. IN THE LAST YEAR THE GOVERNMENT HAS MOVED EFFECTIVELY, ALTHOUGH BELATEDLY, TO MEET THE BULK OF THE VETERANS' GRIEVANCES, REDUCING THEIR DISSATISFACTION AND GIVING THEM A STAKE IN CONTINUED BENEFITS. INDIVIDUALLY, KY ADHERENTS AMONG THE DISABLED VETERANS ARE, HOWEVER, AVAILABLE TO HIM AS KAMIKAZES.

10. THE OTHER SHOCK TROOPS FOR URBAN DISTURBANCES ARE THE MILITANT STUDENTS. THE INFLUENCE OF RADICAL STUDENT LEADERS HAS DWINDLED, SINCE MOST STUDENTS LOGICALLY SUSPECT THEM OF BEING TOOLS OF THE COMMUNISTS, JUST AS THE MODERATE LEADERS ARE BELIEVED TO BE USED BY THE GOVERNMENT. NEVERTHELESS, STUDENTS AS A CLASS APPEAR PARTICULARLY EXCITED OVER THE UNCONTESTED ELECTION, AND, IF THE MILITANTS CAN FIND OR MANUFACTURE SUITABLE CAUSES (E.G., MARTYRS IN A FIGHT WITH THE POLICE), IT IS CONCEIVABLE THEY COULD RALLY AND DIRECT SIZABLE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS. THE AUTHORITIES ARE AWARE OF THE DANGER AND HAVE GENERALLY HANDLED STUDENT PROBLEMS CIRCUMSPECTLY. DEMONSTRATIONS BY STUDENTS AND/OR VETERANS REMAIN, HOWEVER, THE STRONGEST POSSIBILITY FOR VIOLENCE IN THESE COMING WEEKS.

11. ONE OTHER GROUP OF POTENTIAL DEMONSTRATORS IS COMPRISED OF THE KHMER KHROM OF THE THERAVADA BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION, THE MORE MILITANT OF THE TWO MAJOR ETHNIC CAMBODIAN ASSOCIATIONS. THEY HAVE DEMONSTRATED PREVIOUSLY AGAINST THE ADMINISTRATION FOR MINORITY RIGHTS AND HAVE A SPECIAL GRIEVANCE NOW IN THE DEFEAT OF ALL THEIR LOWER HOUSE CANDIDATES, SOME CLEARLY BY UNFAIR MEANS. ALSO, THEY HAVE LONG BEEN SYMPATHETIC TO KY, AND PROBABLY WOULD TEND TO RESPOND TO A CALL BY HIM.

12. ALTHOUGH SEPTEMBER IS NOT NORMALLY A MONTH FOR LABOR AGITATION,

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THERE ARE MANY ISSUES PRESENT THAT COULD BE EXPLOITED. ALSO, THE CVT IS DISGRUNTLED WITH WHAT IT FEELS IS THIEU'S SHABBY TREATMENT OF WORKER-FARMER PARTY CANDIDATES IN THE LOWER HOUSE ELECTION. YET IT DOES NOT APPEAR LIKELY THAT THE CVT'S TRAN QUOC SUU OR ANY OTHER LABOR LEADERS WOULD PROMOTE PUBLIC DISORDERS, AND EVEN THE ANTI-CVT NATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOR IS HOLDING BACK, PREFERRING TO WAIT UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTIONS TO MOVE ON ITS GRIEVANCES. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF DEMONSTRATIONS DID OCCUR WITH SUBSTANTIAL WORKING CLASS PARTICIPATION, THESE LEADERS MIGHT DO LITTLE TO DISCOURAGE THEM. KY HAS SOME SUPPORTERS AMONG THE UNIONS, PARTICULARLY THE TRI-LAMBRETTA AND TAXI DRIVERS, SO HE PROBABLY COULD SPONSOR AT LEAST LIMITED LABOR DEMONSTRATIONS.

13. THE AN QUANG BUDDHISTS, BY FAR THE LARGEST AND MOST IMPORTANT FACTION IN THE OPPOSITION, HAVE NOT YET FORMALLY REACTED TO THE CURRENT ELECTORAL CRISIS. SO FAR THEY HAVE CONFINED THEMSELVES TO INFORMAL AND UNOFFICIAL CRITICISM OF THIEU'S DECISION TO RUN UNOPPOSED, MEANWHILE APPEARING GRATIFIED WITH THEIR PERFORMANCE IN THE LOWER HOUSE ELECTIONS. AN QUANG LAVISHLY PRAISED THE DECISIONS OF GENERAL MINH AND VICE PRESIDENT KY TO ABANDON THEIR CANDIDACIES, AND NOW APPEARS TO BE QUIETLY GLOATING OVER PRESIDENT THIEU'S PREDICAMENT.

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14. ALTHOUGH STILL OPPOSED TO THIEU AND DOUBTING HIS ABILITY TO GOVERN THE COUNTRY OVER THE LONG HAUL, AN QUANG DOES NOT APPEAR INTENT ON MOUNTING DISORDERS IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. LEADERS, IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, HAVE CONFIRMED THAT THEY DO NOT INTEND TO TAKE TO THE STREETS. UNLESS MILITANTS FORCE THEIR HAND OR ISOLATED DISTURBANCES GET OUT OF HAND, THE BUDDHISTS PROBABLY WILL LEAVE VIOLENCE TO OTHER OPPOSITION GROUPS. ALTHOUGH THEIR BASIC DISSATISFACTION WITH THE REGIME WILL NOT BE LESSENED, SOME OF THE INDIVIDUAL LEADERS OF THE CHURCH MAY EVEN BE AMENABLE TO TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATIONS, SHOULD ANY GESTURE BE INITIATED BY THE NOW-EXPOSED EXECUTIVE. THIEN MINH, FOR INSTANCE, REPORTEDLY SUGGESTED IN PRIVATE THAT NOW IS A GOOD TIME FOR THE EXECUTIVE TO GRANT THE CHARTER TO AN QUANG. FEARFUL OF COMMUNIST INTERVENTION AND CAUTIOUS BECAUSE OF PAST FAILURES, THE CHURCH APPEARS CONTENT TO WAIT. IN BRIEF, AN QUANG'S PRESENT QUIESCENCE IS A MAJOR STABILIZING FACTOR IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION. (AIRGRAM ON AN QUANG FOLLOWS.)

15. THE EXTENT OF GENERAL PUBLIC CONCERN, HOWEVER, IS SHOWN BY

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THE FELT NEED OF A WIDE RANGE OF POLITICAL FACTIONS, INCLUDING MANY NORMALLY PRO-ADMINISTRATION, TO CRITICIZE THE PRESIDENT'S ACTIONS AND OFFER ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS. TWO GROUPINGS OF PARTIES AND ORGANIZATIONS WERE PRESENTING PLANS FOR NEW ELECTION PROCEDURES AT THE SAME TIME AS THIEU MADE CLEAR HIS INTENT TO GO AHEAD WITH AN UNCONTESTED ELECTION. EVEN THE NORMALLY PRO-EXECUTIVE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE TUONG FACTION OF THE HOA HAO HAS DECIDED NOT TO DECLARE SUPPORT FOR THIEU. PROFESSORS BONG AND HUY, THE LEADERS OF THE PROGRESSIVE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT, HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR DISMAY TO US OVER THE UNCONTESTED ELECTION AND HAVE INDICATED THAT THE PNM WILL NOT PUBLICLY ENDORSE THIEU. A NUMBER OF SENATORS IN THE PRO-EXECUTIVE DEMOCRATIC BLOC IN THE UPPER HOUSE, INCLUDING HUYNH VAN CAO AND DANG VAN SUNG, HAVE EXPRESSED ANGER AT THIEU'S ACTIONS, SUNG BEING PARTICULARLY ANNOYED OVER THE "BAD USE" OF THE ENDORSEMENT PROVISION IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION LAW WHICH SUNG HAD SUPPORTED ORIGINALLY AT THIEU'S BEHEST.

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16. TRAN VAN DON, NEWLY ELECTED TO THE LOWER HOUSE, REPORTS THAT HE HAS RESUMED HIS ATTEMPT TO BRING THE THREE ANTAGONISTS INTO AGREEMENT: HE HAS URGED THAT THIEU, KY AND MINH SIT DOWN AT THE JOINT GENERAL STAFF AND COMPOSE THEIR DIFFFRENCES IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST. DON'S EFFORTS HAVE SO FAR BEEN UNAVAILING.

17. THE SMALL POLITICAL PARTIES, IN PROTESTING THE UNCONTESTED ELECTION, ARE IN PART JUST EXPLOITING A CHANCE TO ENGAGE IN NEWSWORTHY POLITICAL ACTIVITY. THEIR STATED DISAPPROVAL OF THIEU WILL REINFORCE PUBLIC ATTITUDES SOMEWHAT AND MAY CAUSE THE PRESIDENT SOME DIFFICULTIES WITH HIS LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM DURING THE COMING SESSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. BUT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE PARTIES AND FACTIONS WILL NOW WANT TO JOIN IN OR ENCOURAGE DISTURBANCES AGAINST THE REGIME.

18. MEANWHILE, SPECULATION IS OF COURSE RIFE ON THE POSITION OF THE US. WHILE THE OPPOSITION (AND OCCASIONALLY ALSO THE PRO-THIEU) PRESS HAS OUTDONE ITSELF IN HEAPING BLAME ON THE US, SOBERER HEADS ARE ACUTELY AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF VIET NAM'S SURVIVAL OF REACTIONS IN THE US TO THE ELECTION SITUATION. INDEED WE SENSE THAT MUCH OF THE CONCERN EXPRESSED IN MODERATE CIRCLES IS OVER THE ADVERSE REPERCUSSIONS OF A NO-CONTEST ELECTION IN THE US RATHER THAN IN VIET NAM.

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19. AS INDICATED BY DRV PREMIER PHAM VAN DONG'S NATIONAL DAY SPEECH ON AUGUST 31, THE COMMUNISTS EVIDENTLY REGARD THE ELECTION TURMOIL AS A PROMISING OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE THEIR OBJECTIVES. GIVEN THE LIMITATIONS IN COMMUNIST CAPACITY TO EXPLOIT THE SITUATION ON A LARGE SCALE MILITARILY, WE JUDGE THAT THEY WILL CONCENTRATE ON POLITICAL ACTION, SEEKING TO ESCALATE DISCONTENT AND DISTURBANCES IN THE URBAN CENTERS, SUPPLEMENTED AS USUAL BY SELECTED TERRORISM AND MILITARY ATTACKS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.
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